

T H E
L O U N G E R.

[N^o LXIV.]*Saturday, April 22. 1786.*

To the AUTHOR of the LOUNGER.

S I R,

THAT distress finds some consolation from revealing its misfortunes, is a trite observation, which perhaps is in no instance more strongly felt, than where we have ourselves to blame for our calamities. There is something in making a confession, though but on paper, (even if it should never be communicated to any one), which unloads the mind of a weight that bears it down in secret; and though it cannot pluck the thorn from memory, has certainly the effect of blunting its poignancy. — Suffer me then, Sir, to tell you, or to write as if I were telling you, how unhappy I am, and by what means I have become so.

I was left by my father at the age of thirteen, the eldest of two daughters, under the charge of one of the best and most indulgent of mothers. Our circumstances were affluent, our society respectable, and our education, from its very commencement, had been attended to with care, and provided for with the utmost liberality. No instruction was neglected, no accomplishment unattended to. In attaining these, my sister was not quite so fortunate as I. Born, as I have been often told, with uncommon quickness of parts, I found no difficulty of mastering the studies that were taught me, or of acquiring the embellishments it was wished I should acquire. My sister was often deficient in the one, and awkward at the other. She possessed, however, a sound, plain understanding, and an excellent temper. My superiority never excited envy in her, and I think never vanity in

me. We loved one another most sincerely; and after some years had blunted the grief which my mother felt for her husband's death, there were, I believe, few happier families than ours.

Though our affections were cordial however, our dispositions were very different. My sister was contented to think as other people thought, and to feel as other people felt; she rarely ventured to speculate in opinion, or to soar in fancy. I was often tempted to reject, if not to despise, the common opinions of mankind, and to create to myself a warm, and I am afraid, a visionary picture of happiness, arising from a highly refined sensibility. My mother was at pains to combat these enthusiastic ideas, and to represent the danger of indulging in them. From a desire, perhaps, of overcoming that tendency towards them which she perceived in me, her discourse, when we were alone, almost constantly turned on this subject. As she always allowed us the liberty of argument with her, I stood up in those conversations the warm defender of my own maxims, in contradiction to those prudent ones which she recommended. Hers, I am persuaded, admitted of better reasoning; but my cause gave greater room for eloquence. All my little talents were exerted in the contest; and I have often since thought, that my mother had from nature a bent to my side of the question, which all her wisdom and experience had not been able to overcome; that though she constantly applauded the prudent system of my sister, she was in truth rather partial mine, and vain of that ability with which I defended it. However that might be, I myself always rose from the dispute more and more convinced of the justness of my own opinions, and proud of that superiority which I thought they conferred on me.

We had not long attained a marriageable age, when we found ourselves surrounded with those whom the world terms admirers. Our mother's benevolence and sweetness of temper inclined her to society, and we were too innocent for prudery; we had therefore a number of visitors of the other sex, many of whom were so particular in their attentions, that women who wished to boast of conquests, would have called them lovers. With us they did not always assume that title; my sister was too prudent, and I was too nice, easily to believe a man a lover.

Among those, however, were two gentlemen, whose attachment was declared to me in terms too strong to be misunderstood. *Florio's* person was universally allowed to be handsome; many, of whom I was one, thought it elegant. With external accom-
plishments

plishments his education had furnished him; his manner was easy and unimbarressed; some called it assuming, I thought it natural. His conversation was full of the language of sensibility; in my idea it spoke a mind replete with sensibility itself. Other people sometimes suspected him of shallowness and affectation; I praised him for avoiding the pedantry of knowledge, and the rusticity of men proud of its acquirements.

Alcander was the only son of a particular friend of my mother's, and therefore on a very intimate footing in our family. My mother, with whom he was a favourite, discovered in him a great fund of good sense and of useful knowledge. I was struck with the inelegance of his appearance and address, and the want of refinement in his sentiments and conversation. His goodness and candour were often the topics of my mother's commendation; I remarked his want of discernment, and the coldness of his attachments and aversions. My mother often repeated her own eulogiums of *Alcander*, and the criticisms of the world on *Florio*; I always heard her with a determined opposition of sentiment, and therefore rose from the conversation more averse to the first, and more attached to the latter. *Alcander*, after persisting for some time under a very marked disinclination to him, gave up the pursuit; but as he still continued his visits to the family, particularly during any occasional absence of mine, he transferred by degrees his affections to my sister. When he had ceased to be my lover, I was willing to be very much his friend: my mother had always shewn her partiality in his favour: my sister was won by his virtues, and, after some time, became his wife.

Florio's suit to me was opposed by my mother with rather more vehemence than was natural to her. She often insisted on the infatuation, as she called it, of that deception which I was under with regard to him, a deception which she predicted I should one day be convinced of. Her opposition, however, though it overruled my conduct, never overcame my attachment: I would not be his without the consent of my mother; but my affection it was not in her power to shake. Her love for me overcame her resolution; and at last she gave, however unwillingly, my hand to *Florio*.

I was now the happiest of women. The scenes I had often pictured of conjugal tenderness and domestic happiness, I thought now realized in the possession of a man who, I had taught myself to believe, was to love me for ever, and was himself every thing I ought to love; and I often looked with a degree of pity on the
situation

situation of my sister, whose happiness (for she called it happiness) with Alcander was of a kind so inferior to mine.

How long this lasted I cannot exactly say. I fear I began to be unhappy long before I would allow myself to believe it. I have often wept alone at the coldness and neglect of Florio, when on meeting him, a few words of seeming tenderness and affection made me again reproach my doubts of his love, and think my own situation the most enviable of any. Alas! he at length drove me from this last strong-hold in which my affection for him had entrenched itself. It is now three years since he has treated me in such a manner as to leave me no apology for his treatment. During the last, my mother's death has deprived me of one of the few comforts I had left. From my mother I carefully concealed my distress; but I believe in vain: She lived to guess at my misery; and I fear her sense of it added to the pressure of that disease which brought her to her grave.

After the loss of my husband's love, it is little to talk of my disappointment in his talents and accomplishments. It was long, however, before I allowed myself to see defects which less penetration than I have been flattered with possessing, had long before discovered. My mother had often before our marriage expressed her surprise that one of my abilities should be so deceived, as not to see his inferiority: I believe it is by these abilities the deception is aided. They are able to form a picture to which more ordinary minds are unequal; and in the weakness of their rash attachment, they find the likeness where they wish to find it.—

I was interrupted by my sister. Why are her looks so serene? and why does she tell me, how much mine are altered? I am too proud to allow a witness to my distresses; and from her, of all womankind, I would conceal them.—This dissimulation is due to my pride, perhaps to my duty; yet if you knew, Sir, what it is to smile in public, to seem to be happy, with such feelings as mine;—to act contentment all day long, and to retire at night to my lonely pillow with the anguish my heart has treasured up all the while!—But the subject overpowers me.—Farewell.

CONSTANTIA.

EDINBURGH:

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